

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Wednesday, May 5, 2021, 7:00 pm
Zoom Meeting

- Members:** Christine Boothby (Trustee), Rob Campbell (Trustee), Chris Ellis (Trustee), Sonia Nadon-Campbell (Community Representative), Susan Cowin (Community Representative), Amy Wellings (Community Representative), Cathy Miedema (Association for Bright Children), Mark Wylie (Down Syndrome Association), Lisa Paterick (VIEWS for the Visually Impaired), Ian Morris (Ontario Associations for Families of Children with Communication Disorders), Dr. Maggie Mamen (Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton)
- Association Representatives (Non Voting):** Jennifer Titley (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Teachers' Federation), Connie Allen (Professional Student Services Personnel, Alternate), Jean Trant (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, School Support Personnel), Catherine Houlden (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Teachers), Andrew Winchester (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Alternate), Nancy Dlouhy (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Operations Committee)
- Staff and Guests:** Lynn Scott (Trustee), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Mary Jane Farrish (Superintendent of Instruction, Dr. Petra Duschner (Manager of Mental Health and Critical Services), Christine Kessler (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Amy Hannah (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Stacey Kay (Manager, Learning Support Services), Nicole Guthrie (Manager, Board Services), Steve Spidell (Principal of Colonel By Secondary School), Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator), Miriam Abdalla (Delegate)

1. Call to Order

Chair Nadon-Campbell called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. She acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Territory and thanked the Algonquin people for hosting the meeting on their land. Chair Nadon-Campbell highlighted that 5 May is Red Dress Day: National Day of Awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Mark Wylie,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

3. Delegations

3.1 Miriam Abdalla re Students with Disabilities and the Octomester System

Ms. Abdalla, enrolled in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program, expressed concern for the octomester system and noted that compressed learning periods discriminate against students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). She disclosed that those who struggle with ADHD have much more difficulty staying organized and focused. The octomester system leads to hours of daily homework for those students who have ADHD and the workload leaves little time for mental recovery.

Dr. Mamen reinforced the issues brought forth by Ms. Abdalla, for not only students with ADHD, but for any student with learning challenges.

Condensing a course into a short period of time does not allow for the processing of information. She endorsed the concept of the octomester system as inappropriate for students accessing special needs support.

Ms. Miedema queried a description of the direction taken from other school boards to meet the IB requirements and avoid the octomester system. Ms. Abdalla responded that she had been in discussion with some of her friends, also in the IB program, who attend White Oaks Secondary School in Oakville. The school operates under a different system which was viewed as a variation on quadesters.

4. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

4.1 SEAC Report, 07 April 2021

Moved by Cathy Miedema,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee Report dated 7 April 2021 report be received.

Carried

4.2 Forward Agenda

The SEAC forward agenda was provided for information.

5. Presentations

5.1 Safe Schools Policy and Code of Conduct Policy Phase II Consultation (M.J. Farrish)

The draft versions of P.125.SCO Code of Conduct Policy, P.032.SCO Safe Schools Policy (Managing Student Behaviour) and P.145.SCO Safe Schools Policy (Emergency Preparedness and Response) were presented to ACE for independent review on 21 April 2021.

Superintendent Farrish presented a powerpoint presentation reviewing the safe schools and code of conduct policy consultations. During Phase I of the consultation process, several types of focus groups were formed: students, student senate, parents and guardians, multicultural liaison officers, school administrators and federation partners. Shared themes, which appeared often, were mental health and well-being of students and staff, greater need to monitor bullying in schools, addressing racial slurs, homophobia and sexism, dress code, defining the role of police in schools.

Superintendent Farrish noted that in discussions with school administrators, a focus was placed upon mitigating factors, bias awareness and restorative practices as part of the response when using the continuum of progressive discipline. She advised that school administrators expressed concern about the response to incidents termed as "dysregulation stress behaviours". These situations become recorded as violent incidents as determined by the *Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Act*. In actuality, the students are unable to meet the expectations within the conditions in the school environment. Staff was motivated to determine how the new policies may account for these discrepancies to better support students. Specifically, staff was interested in understanding the components of the different plans to support students and the processes used such as a threat risk assessment.

Major revisions to the policies were shared. These revisions were made through discussion with the District Human Rights and Equity Advisor to provide an equity lens for inclusion, along with the integration of these policies with the Human Rights Policy currently being written. Over 40 policies and procedures relating to safe schools were merged to create the draft policies under review. These policies were written to recognize and promote positive behaviours. The withdrawal of transportation privileges has been incorporated in the new policies. The Exclusions and Modified Day Policy is currently under development, featuring a non-disciplinary approach in response to safety concerns.

Superintendent Farrish mentioned that as the consultation was in Phase 2 of the process, the preferred way of receiving input on the policies is engagement through the designated consultation email address. Trustee Ellis commented that he felt there was not sufficient time on the agenda for a fulsome discussion.

Dr. Mamen shared that three years ago she was asked to present to the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) to address violence and aggression in schools. At that time, the largest increase in violent behaviours was between junior kindergarten and senior kindergarten. She has often heard from parents in her caseload who had been asked to collect their child from the principal's office in an informal suspension scenario. She queried whether there had been any study on safe school behaviours for children in kindergarten. She inquired about the specific approaches that will be needed for kindergarten children who do not fall under the same considerations that are being used in the policy to address behaviours in the secondary school grades. Superintendent Farrish confirmed that a punitive response for the primary grade levels is not consistent with the safe schools policy or the safe schools approach to support students in all grades. The goals are to build relationships and support the development of all students, by assessing individual circumstances and school community expectations, to enable students to express themselves in prosocial ways. She added that school administrators do not have the ability to suspend students in kindergarten up to grade three. She highlighted that in order to change practice, collective responsibilities and commitments must be undertaken within the schools and through professional development. Superintendent Symmonds stated that at all stages of student growth, the District is making headway to take proactive approaches to capitalize on the expertise of multi-disciplinary teams and building capacity at the school level. Learning Support Services (LSS) practises a relationship-based approach to supporting student achievement and well-being. For the 2021-2022 school year, LSS will focus on a broader implementation of the principles described in the book, "The Third Path". In the book, co-author Dr. David Tranter lists eight hierarchical conditions that support student well-being and academic achievement: Safety, Regulation, Belonging, Positivity, Engagement, Identity, Mastery and Meaning. Ongoing collaboration with Dr. Tranter is planned as LSS begins to implementing some of the recommendations contained in the book.

Dr. Mamen suggested that the District remain aware that for safety concerns, the policies and the threshold of expectation cannot be regarded as "one size fits all". She expressed the view that it was important to work with children when they first begin school to imbue a sense of respect and a sense of their own boundaries. Superintendent Symmonds agreed that a focus is required on supporting the development of skills sets within the youngest learners, beginning with ensuring programming is at the appropriate level to reach developmental milestones.

Ms. Allen expressed interest in the development of the Exemptions and Modified Day Policy and supported the concept of graduated entries to

school where children have the opportunity to have a successful hour at school and then build on to the hour gradually. She noted that in her caseload, there are children whose development levels place them at a one year old level; however, they have the right to be at school full-time. Superintendent Farrish replied that though the timeline for this new policy has not been established, it will be a separate policy, outside of a policy that pertains to managing student behaviour, and will create a program that is consistent with developmental stages and milestone goals for the students.

Superintendent Farrish affirmed that although the consultation process will come to a close at the end of the school year for these specific policies, she expressed interest in maintaining the connection with SEAC and Safe Schools to discuss practices within schools.

6. Discussion - Breakout Room

6.1 Accommodations for Specialized Program Classes

Superintendent Symmonds and Manger Kay presented a slideshow on secondary specialized program classes (SPCs). The key messages were that under the geographic model, between the school years 2013-2014 and 2020-2021, 19 additional secondary specialized program classes were added. Using the current model, an additional 10 classes will be required for secondary Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) students by the 2023-2024 school year. This presents the Districts with some complexities as they consider pupil accommodation planning and the equitable distribution of special education supports across secondary schools.

SEAC members were divided into three groups with each group considering the following questions:

- What are the challenges?
- What should we be thinking about?
- What are the next steps we should be considering?

Facilitators reported on the break-out room discussions as follows:

- A school that has an ASD program is a better for school diversity;
- Space must be considered when introducing an ASD class or reducing the number of students in a classroom;
- Education assistants require more professional development to support students with special education needs on a daily basis;
- Consider created community living classrooms to prepare students for the expectations of assisted living or group homes;

- School administrators need to be purposeful when considering placements and transitions for each student;
- The District requires more SPCs at the elementary school level;
- The geographic model was designed to keep students close to their communities but the city boundaries have shifted and travel times have changed;
- The effects of tiered intervention has resulted in smaller cohorts moving forward;
- Increased communication with families will help inform classroom decisions based-on accurate information;
- Consider whether SPCs align with inclusion in schools. Inclusion is important but to have students with special education needs in the back of the classroom working independently of others may not be inclusive;
- Examine practices from other school boards with the least segregated environments;
- There are concerns for the needs of students who could be classified as having "moderate needs" in the classroom setting;
- For de-streaming in grade 9 math, increased special education supports will be required; and
- Talk to students and families in the SPCs to understand their experience.

Superintendent Symmonds requested that committee members contact him, or Manager Kay with further suggestions.

7. Discussion

7.1 2021-2022 Budget Update

Superintendent Symmonds reported that the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) and the Priorities and Partnership Funds (PPFs) were received by the District on 4 May 2021. Financial Services staff are reviewing the funding and evaluating the areas where the PPFs were transferred into GSN for the 2021-2022 school year, such as the funding for After School Skills Development.

Superintendent Symmonds followed-up on the suggestions from the committee which emerged from the 3 March 2021 meeting breakout room discussion. He noted many items raised will be the focus of LSS discussions for next year. The exercise was designed to identify key

priority areas of focus to improve the way service is delivered for families accessing special needs support. His responses were as follows:

- The committee raised that more resources are required and capacity building is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Superintendent Symmonds noted that LSS is working with Program and Learning (PAL) around Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) on capacity building in this way;
- The committee asked for further consideration for early assessment and identification for students who may be at risk for learning difficulties. Superintendent Symmonds shared that evidence-based reading intervention work will be done in parallel to the recommendation review emerging from the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) *Right to Read Inquiry*. These assessment considerations are also linked with LSS's exploration of the Universal Screening Tool. The purpose of the *Learning Support for Students with Special Education Needs* resource is to provide a comprehensive overview of quality programming to meet the needs of students with special education needs within both the regular and SPCs in K to 12 settings. The resource has been a work in progress for the last several months and will be instrumental as it relates to IEPs. In an online setting, the resource presents the opportunity to discuss the purpose and quality of an IEP;
- The committee requested additional provisions for professional development for teaching staff and to build in a schedule where teachers can be available to access training. Superintendent Symmonds responded that although the online learning opportunities have opened new ways to deliver professional learning, there often remains a challenge to find enough replacement teachers. At times when release time is provided, sometimes educators are not able to attend a professional learning session because they cannot be replaced at their school. LSS continues to try to invest in the professional development for all staff;
- The committee raised that differentiated staffing is required, based on classroom needs. Superintendent Symmonds reported that as the District continues to understand identity-based data, to understand that individuals are behind the data and to lead education through an equity lens, a heightened cross-collaboration between departments is occurring. He highlighted that Superintendent Duah is developing a Student Achievement Through Equity (SATE) support model which aligns support from several departments (e.g., PAL, LSS, Indigenous, Equity & Human Rights). The project will involve members of the multidisciplinary team taking a differentiated approach to

learning, as well as examining the specific learning needs of students in schools with low RAISE indexes;

- The committee suggested that when analyzing school resources and funding allocation, adding support to defray the impact of factors, such as poverty and racialization, on the ability for students with special education needs to engage in the curriculum, should be considered . Superintendent Symmonds described the de-streaming work, being undertaken across the District, to encourage students into the academic pathway for grade 9 math, which may impact their trajectory for graduation. He noted that more information will be delivered to SEAC about the streaming of students because pathways for children can be set at a very young age and it is important that the choice is an informed decision for families; and
- The committee specified the importance of investing in support for credit recovery. Superintendent Symmonds noted that LSS will be working with Continuing Education to provide increased special education supports to those in summer learning programs.

8. Department Update

8.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Symmonds reported that special education programs are being conducted predominantly virtually with the provincial stay-at-home order. In an effort to cooperate with the community effort to combat COVID-19 and following the orders from the Ministry, the District is offering in-person learning to approximately 300 students with intensive and complex special education needs. He noted, in April 2021, Premier Doug Ford announced that education workers serving students with special education needs will be eligible for vaccines. The District submitted 1900 names of special education staff to Ottawa Public Health (OPH). The vaccination will be available to all education workers supporting students in-person, effective 6 May 2021. There has been no update on when all students can return to in-person learning.

Superintendent Symmonds reported that COVID-19 and other factors have delayed some elements of the Right to Read Inquiry. A final inquiry report, which will include detailed findings and recommendations for government and education stakeholders is now planned for release in fall 2021. Once released, the recommendations will be included on a SEAC meeting agenda.

Dr. Duschner shared that Mental Health Week is celebrated from 3 May to 9 May. Mental Health Week is a Canadian tradition, with communities, schools and workplaces rallying to celebrate, protect and promote mental health. She noted that the key messages around student mental health

include student learning about mental health, particularly around social emotional learning, and to encourage help seeking behaviour. LSS has taken a three-pronged approach to share information with staff, students and parents and caregivers. Resources were developed by School Mental Health Ontario. The tip sheets include topics such as promoting mental health, how to help students with their wellness, how to identify some of the signs and symptoms of eroded mental health, reminders of how to support students accessing care for their mental health, both within the community and in the school district. Exercises, activities and lesson plans were distributed to promote mental health learning and to explain strategies for stress management. A website called Jack.org, designed for young people by young people, has been a popular resource with the students. LSS has offered a series of live online sessions for parents to talk to District mental health professionals. A specific email address has been created for parents who are not able to join a session and prefer to send questions in writing.

Superintendent Symmonds announced that significant changes are occurring in the management team at LSS. System Principal Kessler and Dr. Duschner have decided to retire from the OCDSB at the end of the 2020-2021 school year. He stated that the contributions that they have made over several years have been incredible and both of them have helped him in his professional learning. He and Chair Nadon-Campbell wished them the best as they assumed their next opportunities.

Superintendent Symmonds communicated that Kate Stoudt will join LSS as a System Principal. System Principal Stoudt has expertise in children's mental health and managing transitions for students with significant needs.

a. Storefront Update

Christine Kessler stated that the Storefront School was established in November 1987 and was located in the St. Laurent Shopping Centre. The school moved in 1998 to the ING building beside the shopping centre, where it continues to operate. Morguard Investment Limited has been graciously supplying the facilities for the past 25 years. This two-year transition program focuses on increasing independence and employability skills for students with developmental disabilities. LSS recently expanded the age criteria for the 2020-2021 school year to include students aged 18, whereas the previous age of entry was 19. Part of the reason for admitting students at age 18 was that staff indicated that some students seemed to become increasingly disengaged at 18. Two students, aged 18, joined the program this school year.

Christine Kessler reported that the program provides supported work experience with one full time teacher and one full time educational assistant. Six students are graduating from the program and three students have obtained employment as of July 2021. At the present time 12 students attend the program. Six new students are entering the program in the 2021-2022 school year. LSS continues to work together with parents, staff and the community to consider the possibilities for the program. This year, half of the students attended the Storefront School in-person and the other half attended virtually; however, most of the components of the program were able to be offered virtually.

Jennifer Perry, Nancy Ford and Tanya Ashton were all named as staff that support the program and contribute to its success.

Trustee Ellis queried whether only students in the General Learning Program (GLP) program are eligible to apply for the Storefront School. Christine Kessler responded that with the assistance of Dr. Duschner, the language in the application form and the criteria for eligibility was rendered more inclusive of students, both in the GLP, as well as other students with developmental disabilities who may find themselves limited to participate in a supported workplace experience.

b. Summer Learning Programs Update

Superintendent Symmonds reported that currently, LSS is in the planning phases to provide the summer learning program for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Developmental Disabilities (DD) profiles. The program will only be available in-person and therefore further provincial lockdown orders might affect the ability to offer this program.

Planning does continue regarding special education support for students in the Continuing Education summer programs to ensure students with special education needs have equitable access to their programs. LSS will continue to work on delivering mental health supports over the summer. Evidence-based reading intervention work is scheduled to be done over the summer with partners in PAL.

Superintendent Symmonds highlighted the concern of the pressure that the last 14 months has had on staff and that employees require a period of rest. Should staff be interested in assisting with summer programming, they will be asked to consider their own mental health as a priority before committing to the extra work.

9. Committee Reports

9.1 Board

There was no report from the Board.

9.2 Committee of the Whole

Ms. Wellings noted that at the Special Committee of the Whole meeting of 20 April 2021, that Policy P.146.HR Equitable Recruitment, Hiring and Promotion was recommended to the Board.

9.3 Advisory Committee on Equity

Ms. Cowin noted that in the Advisory Committee on Equity meeting of 29 April 2021, a member suggested that students with disabilities were not well represented in the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap. They hoped to see that changed in future revisions.

9.4 Indigenous Education Advisory Council

Ms. Campbell noted that in the Indigenous Education Advisory Council meeting of 22 April 2021, the council explored the possibility of land-based education for credit attainment. Ms. Campbell expressed the view that his type of programming would serve special education students well.

9.5 Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Programs

There was no report from the Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Programs.

10. New Business

Ms. Miedema inquired that as the province has announced that all school boards must provide a virtual option for the 2021-2022 school year, will there be any change to the District's previous announcement that students would only be able to access specialized program classes in-person? She asked for an update on the numbers of students in SPCs that have opted for virtual learning for next year. If a comparison could be made to enrolment numbers from the 2020-2021 school year, it would be useful knowledge. She requested an update on any additional supports or considerations being allocated towards students in a regular virtual class, who would normally be placed in a specialized program class. Superintendent Symmonds committed to providing an update for the 2 June 2021 meeting however he was not certain whether he would be able to access comparison enrolment numbers between the current school year and the school year to come.

11. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:53 p.m.

Sonia Nadon-Campbell, Chair,
Special Education Advisory
Committee